



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

---

VOLUME XXXIV

JUNE, 1919

---

NUMBER 6

## CHAUCEER'S DESERT

Miss Brown's recent suggestion of the *Corbaccio* as a partial source of the *House of Fame*<sup>1</sup> must be welcomed by scholars in their attempt to get together all possible analogues for the type of allegory which is represented in that poem. But her conclusions in regard to Chaucer's specific indebtedness may not prove entirely satisfactory, since her argument leans so much on resemblances which may be paralleled throughout almost the entire range of the allegory of the Court of Love.<sup>2</sup> In only one respect does the

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Language Notes*, xxxii, 411 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The first point, that both works are related by the dreamers, is characteristic of many of the love visions. The second, that both dreamers are students who find their pleasure in poring over books and have sorry success in affairs of love, is only a superficial resemblance. Chaucer's books, as the eagle says, are books of love, while Boccaccio's are those which teach the vanity of love. Chaucer's attitude of being unsuccessful in such affairs is constant in his verse. On this point as good a parallel is found in Froissart's *Joli Buisson*, ll. 137 ff. The eighth point is similarly weak because while in Boccaccio the sighings and groanings are those of unhappy lovers, in Chaucer the noise (which is not heard in the valley or desert) is that of the rumor-machine and this includes whisperings happy as well as sad. The parallel which Miss Brown attempts to draw between the tidings which Chaucer will hear and the facts which Boccaccio will learn is unfortunate: Chaucer is told that he will learn love-tidings; Boccaccio is to be instructed about women—"What things women are; for what reasons they are called and wish to be called ladies; and that very few really are ladies." Chaucer took the trouble to create the rumor-machine to develop his point about tidings. Is this the sort of information he is to get from *rumor*? Finally, Miss Brown's seventh point should not have been so listed, since it is merely a confession of weakness albeit not a dangerous one. Some hint as to the general nature of the *House of*

*Corbaccio* at first seem to approximate the English poem more nearly—in the “desert” tract in which both the dreamers eventually find themselves astray. For the purposes of this article we may waive the question of whether Chaucer did or did not use the Italian; on several occasions he is known to have drawn from more than one source for a single feature. It is more important to discover available treatments of the theme elsewhere.

The temple of Venus in the *House of Fame* is well known in the tradition of the Court of Love, and is clearly related to the realm of the Otherworld in folklore. So too is the abode of Fame herself. And in the many descriptions of the Otherworld, the surrounding country lying desolate under a spell is familiar enough, especially in the variety known as the “waste city.”<sup>3</sup> An element of this kind seems to be the forest which borders the Otherworld in the Court of Love literature, and which serves often as a barrier to the longed-for country. Instances occur in the *Mireoirs as Dames* of Watriquet de Couvin, in Froissart’s *Temple d’Onnour*, and in the *Dit dou Lyon* of Guillaume de Machaut.<sup>4</sup> As the scene in Machaut is “De ronces et d’espines pleine,” the “solitude deserta” of the *Corbaccio* is “piena di salvatiche piante, di prune e di bronchi.”<sup>5</sup> A good case may be made out that the valley of the *Corbaccio* is a development of the “selva oscura” of Dante, which is also a “piaggia deserta,” which is also located in a valley,

*Fame*, that it was not designed to continue in the manner of Boccaccio, may be found in the fact that Chaucer mentions it along with the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament* as the first which serves to praise the name of love (*Leg. Good Women*, pro., l. 417).

<sup>3</sup>Gawain passes through a hideous valley in the *Mule sanz Frein*; Lancelot in the *Perlesvaus* wanders through “a waste land, a country broad and long wherein wonned neither beast nor bird, for the land was so poor and parched,” (Branch VII, title XI, Evans’ trans., *Everyman’s Lib.*, p. 104.) Thomas of Erceldoun crosses a “desart wide” on his way to “Elflyn land” (Child, *Eng. Scot. Pop. Ballads*, I, p. 325, C, st. 9).

<sup>4</sup>Watriquet de Couvin, ed. Scheler, pp. 2 ff., ll. 40 ff.; Froissart, ed. Scheler, II, p. 164, ll. 63 ff.; Machaut, ed. Hoepffner, *SATF*, II, p. 169, ll. 285 ff. Cf. Hesdin’s *Prise Amoureuse*, ed. Hoepffner, p. 6, ll. 153 ff. Cf. the thorny road in the scene described by Baudoin de Condé, ed. Scheler, I, pp. 209 ff., ll. 120 ff. Cf. also the scene about the Palace of Mars in the *Teseide*, st. 31. For the theme in German literature, see Neilson, *Court of Love*, Boston, 1899, pp. 126 ff. See also *Romania*, XXIX, pp. 86 and 92.

<sup>5</sup>Ed. Firenze, 1828, p. 162.

and into which the poet wanders in fear when "la diritta via era smarrita." In this case too a man of gret auctoritee rescues the wanderer, and interprets to him his ensuing experiences. In its setting in Boccaccio's narrative, however, the waste country seems rather to belong to the tradition which I have outlined.

What is more startling is that the scene is reproduced in a French poem which we know Chaucer used as a source for the *House of Fame*,—the *Panthere d'Amours* of Nicole de Margivale.<sup>6</sup> Although the similarity of the two poems has been appreciated in so far as the House of Fortune and the House of Fame are concerned, hardly enough attention has been accorded to the parallel of the general scheme and, in particular, of the flight with the birds and of the use of the waste country. In the *Panthere* the poet is carried away by the birds; in a forest he sees the panther near the waste country; he is entertained by the Court of Love; he gets a closer view of the waste region, which is interpreted to him at length by the God of Love; he goes to the Hotel de l'Amour, and finally to the House of Fortune. Before Chaucer's eagle takes him to his "bon hostel," he visits the palace of Venus and comes out on the desert tract; otherwise the course of the episodes is the same. And even in regard to this point we may note that with Nicole the dreamer goes to examine the waste country after leaving the Court of Love. If a shift of episodes is necessary here it is also necessary in the case of the *Corbaccio*.<sup>7</sup>

The problem is somewhat complicated by the fact that a fifteenth-century Spanish allegory also introduces some of these details in a way that may seem to bear on Chaucer's use. The *Laberinto de Fortuna* of Juan de Mena might be taken as based in part on the section of the *Corbaccio* leading up to the "Laberinto d'Amore." In the Spanish the sequence of episodes is as follows: the poet is engaged in denouncing Fortune, when suddenly he is snatched up

<sup>6</sup> Ed. H. A. Todd, Paris, 1883, *SATF*. See Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's HF*, Chaucer Soc., 1907, p. 118 and *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Palice of Honour* of Douglas the desert scene appears just before the procession of the Court of Love, and in this point the poem is closer to the *Panthere*. It is sometimes difficult to tell what Miss Brown considers the parallels: thus, the Shade of the *Corbaccio* serves both for the eagle and the man of gret auctoritee; and the laberinto for the Palace of Venus, the house of Fame, and the house of rumors.

by Bellona's chariot drawn by winged dragons, and deposited on a desert before the Palace of Fortune:

Assi me soltaron en medio de un plano  
desque ouieron dado comigo una buelta,  
como a les vezes el aguila suelta  
la presa bien nol finche la mano;  
yo de tal caso mirable, ynumano,  
falleme espantado en un grand desierto  
do vi multitud, non numero cierto,  
en son religioso e modo profano.

E toda la otra vezina planura  
estaua cercada de nitido muro,  
assi trasparente, clarifico, puro,  
que marmol de Paro pareçe en albura.<sup>8</sup>

At this juncture Providencia appears out of a dark cloud and becomes his guide. There is nothing in this account that cannot be adequately explained by general allegorical tradition, in particular by the *Anticlaudianus* (for the chariot and Providencia), and by the *Panthere d'Amours* (for the "nitido muro" and the House of Fortune). French tradition, to which I shall later return (note, however, the valley in the *Dis de l'Escharbote*), and Spanish allegory as well, in such a poem as the *Infierno de los enamorados* of Santillana, might have furnished the desert. And since it appears that even the title "Laberinto" may be quite independent of any reminiscence of Boccaccio,<sup>9</sup> what we have here may really be an adaptation of the stock themes of allegory in much the same manner as Chaucer's. Possibly Juan de Mena knew Chaucer's poem; for curiously enough in 1520 Guerrero apparently saw the

<sup>8</sup> Foulché-Delbosc, *Cancionero Castellano del siglo XV*, Madrid, 1912, I, p. 154, st. 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> See *Romanic Review*, III, p. 228, n. 20. The entire article is a study of the sources of Juan de Mena; and the only point in this poem which Professor Post thinks may have been influenced by the *Corbaccio* is the mist surrounding Providencia (*ibid.*, p. 239). The possibility is not mentioned in a later study by the same author, *Mediæval Spanish Allegory*, Cambridge, 1915, pp. 234 ff. This work gives a useful review of the tradition of the forest and the desert in Spanish (pp. 75 ff.), and the use of the arid meadow in Andreas Capellanus, which is pointed out (p. 78), is worth noting. In the *Infierno* of Santillana the dreamer is seized by Fortune and carried to a lofty mountain forest (st. 1, Foulché-Delbosc, *op. cit.*, I, p. 544).

similarity, imitated the *Laberinto*, and transformed it into a *Castle of Fame*.<sup>10</sup> No real argument is to be derived from this Spanish development; in any case it affords simply a striking coincidence.

There is still one difficulty to be dealt with, however, and in this the *Panthere* and the *Corbaccio* both prove deficient. Chaucer's "large feld" is not merely a desolate region; it is not a forest at all. It is actually a sandy desert:

When I out at the dores cam,  
I faste aboute me beheld.  
Then saw I but a large feld,  
As fer as that I mighte see,  
Withouten toun, or hous, or tree,  
Or bush, or gras, or ered lond;  
For al the feld nas but of sond  
As smal as man may see yet lye  
In the desert of Libye;  
Ne I no maner creature,  
That is formed by nature,  
Ne saw, me for to rede or wisse.<sup>11</sup>

The sense of desolation and fear is common in scenes of the kind, in the *Panthere* as well as in the *Corbaccio* and elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Verbal echoes of either of the possible sources are lacking here;<sup>13</sup> and

<sup>10</sup> Gallardo, *Ensayo de una Biblioteca Española*, Madrid, 1863, I, col. 165.

<sup>11</sup> *HF*, ll. 480 ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Panthere*, ll. 147 ff. and ll. 690 ff.

<sup>13</sup> The only verbal reminiscence proposed by Miss Brown is in Chaucer's expression "domus Dedali or. Laborintus" referring to the house of rumors. But the word "laborintus" is fairly common in Latin, Italian, and English in Chaucer's time: *Aen.* v, l. 588; Servius's commentary on *Aen.* vi, 14, in his *Grammatici*, Thilo and Hagen, II, p. 6, ll. 7 and 19; p. 7, l. 7 (for Chaucer's knowledge of Servius, see *Mod. Phil.*, xv, pp. 6 ff. It is easy to see how Chaucer came on the passage in the *Aeneid*: Book vi has to do with the mountain shrine where the Sibyl gives her prophetic utterances through the hundred mouths of the cavern; see *HF*, l. 439). See the Latin marginal index to *Conf. Amantis*, ed. Macaulay, Oxford, 1901, III, p. 89 (called in the story of Dedalus his "house.") See *Amor. Vis.*, xxii, l. 4; Petrarch's *Rime*, Carducci, 1905, 211, 114, and 224, l. 4. The expression may have been proverbial: see Trevisa, *Polychron.*, Rolls, I, 8. See also Boethius, *Cons. Phil.*, III, pr. xii, l. 77, translated by Chaucer "the house of Dedalus." It is to be noted that in the *HF* Chaucer uses the Latin form, whereas when borrowing from the Italian in this poem he usually keeps the Italian form (see Imelmann, *Eng. Stud.*, 45, p. 411). Also note that the story of Dedalus would naturally be in his mind for other reasons: see *HF*, ll. 405 ff.; 919-20; and the flight with the eagle.

Chaucer turns instead to the passage in the *Inferno*, where we find the same allusion to the desert of Libya as described in Lucan's *Pharsalia*.<sup>14</sup>

What reminded Chaucer of the passage in Dante? Let us examine Dante's account:

Dico che arrivammo ad una landa,  
che dal suo letto ogni rimuove.  
La dolorosa selva l'è ghirlanda  
intorno, come il fosso tristo ad essa;  
quivi fermammo i passi a randa a randa.  
Lo spazzo era un' arena arida e spessa,  
non d'altra foggia fatta che colei,  
che fu da' piè di Caton già soppressa.<sup>15</sup>

In the *Panthere* the dreamer stands gazing at the valley, while its meaning is made clear to him; and Nicole says that his valley was enclosed by a hedge and also that within the enclosure was a "fosse":

Un po regardai devers destre;  
Ilec une beste vi nestre  
A l'entree d'une valee  
Qui estoit d'orties fermee,  
De ronces et de fors espines.<sup>16</sup>  
Dedens le val ot une fosse  
Ou la beste se reposoit.<sup>17</sup>  
De grant paor lors tressailli,  
Quant je me vi en la valee,  
Et que la haie oy trespassee.<sup>18</sup>

Chaucer certainly thought of the lines of the *Inferno* for some reason, and here is at least a possible explanation. Immediately after the episode in Dante comes the flight with Geryon.

Chaucer's eagle can hardly be said to owe much to that monster; it borrows instead a few feathers from the bird of which Dante dreams while he lies sleeping in a valley of the *Purgatorio*. But there is another bird which Virgil describes as flying about the towns of Libya, a region some of the concerns of which occupy Chaucer for a long time in the early part of his poem. This is

<sup>14</sup> *Phars.*, ix, 371 ff.

<sup>15</sup> *Inf.*, xiv, ll. 8 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Ll. 83 ff. Cf. Machaut, ed. Hoepffner, II, p. 169. Here in the *Dit dou Lyon* the poet meets the lion which becomes his faithful guide.

<sup>17</sup> Ll. 448 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Ll. 690 ff.

Rumor. It is interesting to note at this point that it is the eagle who serves so faithfully in guiding Chaucer into the machine of rumors. And if Chaucer had at his elbow one of the convenient manuals of mythology of the time, he may have added a few more plumes from this source. In planning a poem in which he intended to describe a deity comparatively new in mediæval allegory, it would be natural for him to open Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum*, where Fame is allowed considerable space. There he could find the long quotation from Ovid in which the location of Fame's lofty palace is described.<sup>19</sup> There Boccaccio gives the Virgilian passage (which may have recalled the similar passage in Boethius) regarding the sliding scale of Fame's stature.<sup>20</sup> And there his eye would also have met the following commentary on Virgil's Rumor:

Monstrum autem ingens asserit: et horrendum ratione corporis quod illi describit: uolens in hoc *quod* omnes eius plumae: cum auem dicat propter eius celerem motum habeant hominis effigiem. ad hoc ut per hoc intelligatur unumquemque de aliqua re loquentem pennam unam addere phamae et sic ex multis cum multae sint auium pennae: non ex paucis phama conficitur.<sup>21</sup>

This monster was rather better than Geryon for many reasons—especially those connected with both allegory and folklore.

There were others who visited the desert and found it an empty waste without a leaf of hope. Deschamps laments in one of his lays that he was once in the earthly paradise of love and that all the world was bright and happy, but that now everything is changed. He is now in the desert of love:

<sup>19</sup> *De Gen. Deorum*, dated in the colophon 1487 (Hain's *Repertorium*, 1826, \*3316), p. ix ro.

<sup>20</sup> P. viii vo. The passage in full in the *Aeneid* (IV, 173) begins, "Ex templo Libyae magnas it Fama per urbes." Boccaccio's quotation starts with the next line. Note particularly:

Parua metu primo mox sese attollit in auras  
Ingrediturque solo et caput inter nubila condit, (176-7).

<sup>21</sup> P. ix ro. The passage is a commentary on Virgil's lines:

Monstrum horrendum ingens, cui quot sunt corpore plumae  
Tot vigiles oculi: subter, mirabile dictu,  
Tot linguae, totidem ora sonant, tot subrigit auris, (181-3).



Ne venez pas en ce desert  
 Ou il n'a fueille, ne boys vert,  
 Herbe, fleur, fruit, n'autre verdure;  
 Tout chant d'oiseil y ert desert.<sup>22</sup>

Chaucer may have used this *Lay du Desert d'Amours* for further suggestions; its introduction of other details such as the thorns shows its reliance on the general tradition.<sup>23</sup> Chartier's *Hospital d'Amours* (dated 1441) describes a thorny road called "Trop dure Responce" which leads to the bottom of a dismal valley. There the poet finds a great desert "Montjoye de Douleurs," a true vale of tears where every tree is full of "gens pendus" and where the river flows full of drowned lovers.<sup>24</sup>

The desert, then, seems to be the realm of despair for the lover. Chaucer after visiting the very temple of Venus herself is left in this region; truly he is one of those whom Love "list not avaunce." But he has consolation in store, for he is presently to hear some very pretty gossip about his neighbors. Rumor, who flew about telling the story of Dido to the Libyans, bestowed on Chaucer a particular favor:

Luce sedet custos aut summi culmine tecti  
 Turribus aut altis, et magnas territat urbes,  
 Tam ficti pravique tenax quam veri,

and it took him where the air was filled with love-tidings apparently of some importance.

HOWARD R. PATCH.

*Bryn Mawr College.*

<sup>22</sup> Deschamps, *SATF*, II, p. 190, ll. 236 ff. Note ll. 240-1:

Fors que bruiere n'y appert,  
 Noif, gresil et toute froidure.

These recall the scene in the *Inferno* (XIV, ll. 28-30), especially "Come di neve in alpe senza vento." Raynaud seems to date the poem 1376 (XI, p. 23). See also Deschamps, III, pp. 373-4.

<sup>23</sup> See the passage already pointed out by Sypherd (*op. cit.*, p. 53, n. 1) in the *Prison Amoureuse*. See also the valley before the city of the Otherworld in Watrquet's *Dis de l'Escharbote*, ll. 73 ff. (cf. l. 175). See the forest in the *Jardin de Plaisance* published in 1501 but containing some early material (fol. e ii v<sup>o</sup>; fol. f iii; and h ii v<sup>o</sup>). Note too the poem of love by Oton de Granson called "Le desert" mentioned in a manuscript (*Romania*, XIX, 431).

<sup>24</sup> See Neilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 ff., and pp. 87 ff.